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ASIA INSTITUTE

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

I. Need Assessment

Boston has a very large Asian community but it lags behind San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles in its patronage of and facilities for Asian cultural activities.

Six years ago before the establishment of the Chinese Culture Institute, Boston Public had very little exposure to Chinese art and culture. Chinese artists had no place to exhibit or perform. The Chinese Culture Institute provides opportunities, encouragement, facilities and leadership to them. Now the Chinese artistic community is alive and thriving.

But CCI's budget is small and its space limited. It can not meet all the needs of the Asian cultural community. Without facilities, funding, and opportunities, many Asian cultural groups are frustrated and discouraged. Many performers, for instance, can only practice their trade once in a great while when there is a chance. While their talents are buried, Boston's loss is tremendous. Many touring companies from Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland often skip Boston because there is no readily available theatre to stage their shows and Asian organizations in Boston are often so frustrated with the difficulties in booking a performance space.

What CCI has done in the past six years encompasses visual arts and humanities, performing arts, education, and outreach. It regularly mounts art exhibitions and humanities exhibitions, produces plays, music and dance concerts, offering lecture series, classes and workshops, and sending musicians, dancers, visual artists, speakers, workshop conductors to colleges, schools, museums, libraries, and other institutions. CCI's programming can serve as a model for developing Boston's Asian cultural programs.

What is urgently needed is adequate facilities to house the various programs.

II. PERFORMING ARTS FACILITIES

A theatre with 500 -700 seating capacity equipped with adequate theatrical lighting and sound system for music and dance concerts, stage plays, opera and other types of shows such as ethnic and historical costume shows, fashion shows and beauty pageants.

Stage: 40' x 60' with a deep back stage

Dressing rooms: two 600 sq.ft dressing for men and women respectively with counters, large mirrors and adjacent washrooms

Rehearsal halls: two 50' x 60' rehearsal halls.

Storage rooms for sets, equipment, costumes, instrument and so forth.

Offices for 7 to 10 staff members

When the dream of having a good theatre and rehearsal hall becomes reality, local Asian performing groups and those not belonging to any

groups will be greatly encouraged. I am sure more groups will be formed. Activities will increase rapidly. We will be able to invite performing groups from other cities and from abroad to come regularly. These will strengthen Boston's cultural vitality and renew its reputation as a cultural mecca of America.

III. VISUAL ART FACILITIES

CCI's space is donated by TNEMC and the capital improvement was donated by Dr. An Wang and the Wang Laboratories. We have a 10 year lease. There are 9 years left. The facilities are adequate at the present time. But we must make long range plans and therefore we are looking for a permanent home for CCI.

CCI regularly mounts high quality exhibitions. Since there are only 12 months in a year and only a few shows will be mounted within that period, we have to reject many proposals. To expose the art of various Asian cultures -- Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Indian and so forth, we should have at least two other galleries in addition to CCI's. There should be sufficient storage space for art work and offices for 4 staff members.

IV. MEDIA ART FACILITIES

An audio visual production room for video and slide tape production.

V. EDUCATION PROGRAM FACILITIES

3 or 4 class rooms for language classes, art classes, workshops, discussions of various kinds.
Ceramic workshop with 3 kilns
Storage with shelves

VI. COMMUNITY ACTIVITY AND FUNCTION SPACE

A hall or a large lobby used for celebrations and festivities such as the Chinese new year, lantern festival, Asian folk festival, etc. and special conferences, lecture series and symposia.

VII. EXISTING ASIAN ART AND CULTURE GROUPS

Chinese Culture Institute's Choral Society
Chinese Culture Institute's Music and Dance Ensemble
Chinese Culture Institute's Chinese Artists Association
Chinese Culture Institute's Drama Club
Chinatown's Ku Sing Music Club
Chinatown's Boston Dance Company
Asian American Resource Workshop's music group
Intercollegiate Choral society
3 other Chinese choral groups and several dance groups
a Peking opera club
a Philippines dance group
there are Vietnamese, Cambodian, Iran, Indian, Japanese, and Korean groups whose names have to be identified.
There are many visual artists and performers of Asian descent who do not belong to any groups.

Proposal: A Pan-Asian Art and Culture Center

Vision

Asian Americans are currently the second fastest growing minority group in the state. The present Asian and Pacific Islander population is estimated at about 90,000, the majority of whom live in the Boston area. Asian Americans are a diverse group of over twenty-five nationalities. They include recent immigrants and refugees and fifth generation Asian Americans. They have come to the Boston area because of government resettlement policies, the quest for higher education, the desire to be with family and community, and in response to the strong Massachusetts economy. Issues affecting the entire community include negative stereotyping, discrimination and anti-Asian violence.

There are many cultural organizations and individual artists within the increasingly diverse Asian population in Boston. Their activities foster cross-cultural understanding, instill ethnic pride and a sense of identity, and contribute significantly to the vitality and complexity of urban life. Visual and performing artists and arts groups include musicians, dancers, actors, craftsmen, fabric artists, writers and storytellers of Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean, Japanese, Laotian and the other nationalities which make up the Asian American community. In addition, the Boston area is a frequent stop for internationally known performing arts troupes from China and Japan.

Many of Boston's local Asian arts organizations are still in their infancy, struggling to build their skills and establish themselves, while others are seeking to develop further and increase their audiences. These organizations and individuals must often make do with inadequate facilities and funding at scattered locations, in temporary or borrowed spaces. This uncertainty makes frequent practices and performances difficult and long term planning and growth impossible.

The development of the Mid-Town Cultural District, which abuts the heart of Chinatown, presents a golden opportunity for the creation of a pan-Asian cultural center in the Hinge Block of the District. The location is ideal in that its proximity to the only Asian community in Boston with a land base and sizable population would provide it with a ready made audience. Its vitality would be further encouraged by the through traffic which will come

with the growth of the Cultural District. Chinatown is the economic, social and cultural hub of the Asian American community. Asians from all over the state come regularly to Chinatown to use its services and participate in the community. Its festivals and celebrations regularly draw crowds of participants and tourists.

In the past, Chinatown has borne the brunt of such developments as the construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike, the Central Artery, and the institutional expansion of Tufts/New England Medical Center. As a result of these developments hundreds of families lost their homes and had to be relocated and the area of the community was reduced by half -- this in spite of a continually growing population. To the west of Chinatown, the Combat Zone was officially zoned an adult entertainment district in the 1970's. Consequently, this community of families and small businesses was cut off from the rest of the business district by two blocks of pornography, prostitution and drug dealing. These activities also spilled into the community itself, and the residents of Chinatown have, for years, had to tolerate drug dealers and prostitutes and their customers doing their business on their doorsteps.

In the past few years, the Combat Zone has lost its prominence, and many of the bars and adult book stores have closed. In many cases, as soon as one closes, an Asian business opens to take its place. The result is improvement and revitalization of the neighborhood.

But a community needs more than businesses for its development. The arts also play an important role in defining and giving identity to a community. An Asian cultural center located in the Hinge Block, stimulated by the other cultural activities in the area, would be a great benefit to the development of culture in the Asian community, and of the sense of the District itself. This center could serve not only the needs of the Chinatown community, but also the broader Asian community. The pan-Asian nature of this center would be important from an economic and programming point of view and because such a center would foster the development of the entire Asian arts community. Full use of the center's facilities would be more likely if it were to tap the talents of all of the Asian ethnic groups. Such a broad reach would also contribute to a diversity of programming and make for a more interesting season and diversity of offerings would be a singular attraction in the District.

Therefore, we propose that a multi-faceted and pan-Asian cultural center which encompasses visual and performing arts and educational programs be developed. We believe such a facility, if appropriately sited

within the Hinge Block between Chinatown and the Theater District, would add a unique flavor to the Mid-Town Cultural scene while serving the Asian American community.

Facilities

A Pan-Asian Cultural Center which would serve the diverse needs of the Asian cultural community would need to include facilities for visual arts, performance arts, media, research, education, administration, and to be truly part of the community, space for public events.

Visual Art

There is presently one gallery in the Boston area which shows primarily Asian American art, and one gallery with an excellent location which shows contemporary Chinese art. The works that these galleries show include artists in the Boston area, the East Coast, and Asia. Both galleries have full schedules, and could show more works. More talented Asian artists in the Boston area are continually trying to make their works known, and prominent Asian artists from other parts of the U.S. and abroad are also willing to participate and show their works. An additional gallery for Asian American art will be able to show excellent works ranging from the traditional to the avant garde.

A professional gallery/exhibition floor space	1,000 sq/ft
Office, storage area, slide library	500 sq/ft

subtotal:	1,500 sq/ft

Media Art

The media needs of the Asian community, particularly the non-English speaking community, are presently served by Chinatown Cable Council, The Asian American Resource Workshop, the "Dragon Gate" radio program, and video outlets, primarily in the Chinatown area.

Improved audio visual production facilities would encourage greater participation by various ethnic groups in the participation of media for the Asian community. An Asian television production studio and radio station

station or audio production facilities could produce multi-lingual programs for distribution for radio and the cable television network.

Video production studio, 12 ft. ceilings	1,000 sq/ft
Video editing room	200 sq/ft
Darkroom	200 sq/ft
Audio recording studio	200 sq/ft
Storage space for equipment, tapes, slides and photos	100 sq/ft

subtotal:	1,700 sq/ft

Performing Arts

There are numerous Asian and Asian American performing groups in the Boston area representing Cambodian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Pilipino, Laotian, Vietnamese and other nationalities. The performance areas include traditional and modern dance, theater groups, storytellers, traditional and modern music groups. Most of these groups practice out of homes and perform at ethnic and multi-cultural celebrations, parties and in schools. A few have their own studios. In addition, Boston is regularly visited by touring troupes from Asia whose performances are well attended.

If the Asian performing community is to develop and expand its audience further a multi-purpose theater with a stage suitable for dance, plays, panel discussions and film screenings would be required.

Multi-purpose theater/400 seat capacity & support	15,000 sq/ft

subtotal:	15,000 sq/ft

Educational Programs

Cultural educational programming is important to train new artists and **increase** the public's appreciation for Asian and Asian American culture. Cultural education programs currently in existence include a folk arts internship, storytelling with Asian themes, language classes, culture classes and workshops. In addition, the classroom facilities could be used for English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and citizenship classes for which there is a constant and unmet demand.

The availability of classroom space for these and other educational activities, which is centrally located, would help to insure that these activities continue and build the audience for Asian and Asian American culture while also serving the needs of the immigrant and refugee communities.

5 classrooms of 30 person capacity (total)	3000 sq/ft
Library and research area	300 sq/ft
Office and maintenance space	500 sq/ft

subtotal:	4,300 sq/ft

Community Activities

The Asian community in Boston has no large community space of its own for social functions and gatherings. Activities in such a space would include cultural activities and celebrations, dance parties, receptions and community meetings. In addition, office space for a variety of cultural organizations will give stability to these groups which either presently have no offices or are in a precarious tenant position.

A large atrium space would serve these various needs and help bring communities together.

Atrium space	10,000 sq/ft
Support and maintenance space	500 sq/ft
7 offices -- for community organizations	3,500 sq/ft
Administrative offices	1,000 sq/ft

subtotal:	15,000 sq/ft

Support Space

Additional space to support the entire complex would include bathrooms, a kitchen, storage areas, and maintenance space

Bathrooms	1,000 sq/ft
Kitchen	1,000 sq/ft
Storage	1,000 sq/ft
Maintenance	500 sq/ft

subtotal:	3,500 sq/ft

TOTAL SPACE REQUIREMENTS*	41,000 sq/ft
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*** This is a conservative estimate as it does not include elevators, stairwells, ventilation, and utilities, among others.**

Summary

The Asian community in Boston is currently the second fastest growing minority group in the state. The influx of refugees and immigrants along with an established Asian American population brings with it cultures and traditions and new ways of seeing the world which are a valuable contribution to the cultural life and vitality of the city and the Commonwealth.

Chinatown, as a neighbor or the Mid-Town Cultural District is a vital player in the development of the district. For well over a decade it has borne the brunt of the Combat Zone's activities. Its current expansion into the Combat Zone, the land takings that it has had to endure because of institutional and expressway expansion, give it a prior claim to the benefits which may come from any new development within the district.

The Hinge Block of the Mid-Town Cultural District, located as it is next to a large, permanent, Asian community is the ideal location for a cultural center which would serve the needs and draw upon the talents of the diverse groups within this community. This center must have a pan-Asian

perspective in order to draw the diversity of programming available within these communities and in order to ascertain and fill their needs

A Pan-Asian Cultural Center providing a variety of facilities and services within the Hinge Block will give the Mid-Town Cultural District added diversity and excitement while meeting the needs of a growing community

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Pan-Asian Cultural Center
Facilities Needs

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FACILITY	SQ/FT	SUB-TOTAL
VISUAL ARTS		
4 professional gallery/exhibition floor space	1000	
Office, storage area, slide library	500	
		1500
MEDIA		
Video production studio, 12 ft. ceilings	1000	
Video editing room	200	
Darkroom	200	
Audio recording studio	200	
Storage space for equipment, tapes, slides and photos	100	
		1700
THEATRE		
Multi-purpose theater / 400 seat capacity	15000	
		15000
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES		
5 classrooms of 30 person capacity (total)	3000	
Library and research area	800	
Office and maintenance space	500	
		4300
PUBLIC SPACE		
Atrium space	10000	
Support and maintenance space	500	
7 offices -- for community organizations	3500	
Administrative offices	1000	
		15000
SUPPORT SPACE		
Bathrooms	1000	
Kitchen	1000	
Storage	1000	
Maintenance	500	
		3500
TOTAL:		41000

